



## USING DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENING TO IMPROVE CHILDREN'S HEALTH

### WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

Children with developmental or behavioral disabilities are missing vital opportunities for early detection and intervention. In the United States, 12% to 16% of children have a developmental or behavioral disability including autism, mental retardation, and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. However, only 50% of these children are identified as having a problem before starting school, by which time significant delays may have already occurred and opportunities for treatment have been missed.

Developmental screening is a brief assessment designed to identify children who should receive more intensive diagnosis or assessment and to provide early detection and intervention which can make a significant difference and reduce the need for more costly interventions. The health and well-being of children, especially children with developmental disabilities, can improve from developmental screenings. For example, the National Academy of Sciences concluded that early detection and intervention significantly improves outcomes for children with autism. As many as 85% to 90% of children with autism who participate in systematic intervention before they are 5 years of age gain the ability to talk, which helps them reach their full potential.

The healthcare system is one of the few places where children under 5 years of age are consistently seen and has the ideal system for tracking child development through screening. However, because of time constraints and concerns about financial reimbursement, most primary care providers either do not conduct developmental screening or rely on informal methods that identify less than half of the children with developmental and/or mental health problems.

### WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

- Developed a developmental screening public health research agenda and developed recommendations with key stakeholders.
- Developed a pilot screening program for autism and other developmental disabilities in Philadelphia.
- Co-sponsored and presented findings at the Health and Human Services Summit on Autism in November 2003.
- Devised an initial plan for a public health campaign to increase awareness in parents and key stakeholders on the importance of screening for autism and other developmental disabilities.
- Created intervention and the need for systematic developmental screening and assessment.
- Launched a CDC Developmental Screening website.

### WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

- Acquire a manuscript on existing developmental screening data sources and systems.
- Develop other pilot screening and early intervention programs for developmental disabilities.
- Improve the capacity to monitor nationwide the integration of developmental screening into primary care and other relevant systems.
- Launch a public health campaign to increase awareness in parents and key stakeholders on the importance of screening for autism and other developmental disabilities.

*For additional information on this or other CDC programs, visit [www.cdc.gov/program](http://www.cdc.gov/program)*

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